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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS; NSC FOR E. MILLARD

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [EAID](#) [CE](#) [NO](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: In public statement, president's party flays
GSL's handling of peace process and Norway's role

Refs: (A) FBIS Reston Va DTG 180355Z Nov 02

- (B) FBIS Reston Va DTG 160734Z Nov 02
- (C) Colombo 2133, and previous

(U) Classified by Ambassador E. Ashley Wills.
Reasons 1.5 (b,d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: President Kumaratunga's party, the People's Alliance, has issued a public statement excoriating the government's handling of the peace process. The statement was also critical of the Norwegian facilitation effort, and U.S. and UK participation in the Oslo conference. Somewhat at odds with the statement, the president's public stance on the peace process has been relatively upbeat. Given the strong support for the peace process among the public, we do not see the PA statement as making a big impact, but it could be a portent of attacks to come. Suggested "if asked" press guidance is contained in Para 12. END SUMMARY.

Public Statement by the PA

2. (SBU) President Kumaratunga's party, the People's Alliance (PA), issued a public statement late November 15 harshly criticizing the government's handling of the peace process. The statement also criticized Norway's facilitation role. (Note: A copy of the statement has been faxed to SA/INS.) The statement was issued in the name of Sarath Amunugama, the PA's media spokesman, but was almost certainly the work of former Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar, a close adviser to Kumaratunga. (Note: Kadirgamar reviewed the statement line-by-line at a November 15 press conference called by the PA.) Key snippets from the long and detailed statement included:

-- "The UNF (United National Front) and some governments, notably the Norwegian, say that the talks with the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) are proceeding in the right direction. In the opinion of the People's Alliance, the direction of the talks is right only for the LTTE."

-- "Recent actions of the LTTE demonstrate a clear trend towards the consolidation of its authority in the northern and eastern provinces...The LTTE has spoken publicly of already having a standing navy, law courts, police stations, banks, and other institutions...Those actions appear to reflect the LTTE's intention to create and dominate some kind of parallel governmental entity in the north and east...which would lead inevitably to the establishment of a separate state."

-- "The PA also views with concern the role currently being played by the Norwegian government in the negotiation process...Today, it appears to the people of Sri Lanka that the role of the Norwegian government has been unjustifiably enlarged and that it is no longer visibly impartial...The Norwegian government seems more concerned with arranging an outcome of the talks that can be pronounced a 'success' for the UNF and the LTTE rather than with the long-term interests of Sri Lanka and its people. The destiny of Sri Lanka is too precious to be left to be determined by the UNF and the LTTE under the supervision of the government of Norway."

-- "The prime minister and his negotiating team have not yet, after eleven months of the current peace process, thought it fit to inform the country, the president, and the Parliament and perhaps even most of the cabinet, of the policy framework which would form the basis for negotiations."

3. (U) In its conclusion, the statement also made a series of demands, including that the GSL insist that the LTTE renounce the use of violence and accept decommissioning of all of its weapons. The statement

also called for the government to do more public briefing re its plans for the peace process, noting that the PA planned to begin a process of "national consultations." Finally, the statement demanded that the government seek a "thorough revision" of the February ceasefire accord, which was "being implemented to the grave prejudice of the armed forces of Sri Lanka."

Criticism of the U.S. and UK

14. (SBU) The PA statement was also critical of U.S. and UK participation in the upcoming Oslo donors' conference, stating:

"The PA is disturbed by the impending accommodation of the LTTE, on a level of parity with the government of Sri Lanka, at the forthcoming talks to be held in Oslo. It is said that at these talks the governments of the U.S. and the UK will be represented at a high political level...The signal that will go out from Oslo is that, notwithstanding resounding universal declarations that terrorism must be resisted in all its manifestations, terrorism will in fact be rewarded."

(Note: This aspect of the PA statement was also mirrored in recent editorials in "The Island," a strongly anti-LTTE, Sinhalese chauvinist daily. In reference to Oslo, the editorials essentially charged the U.S. and UK were soft toward the LTTE, while asserting a hard-line policy toward other terrorist groups, e.g., Al-Qaida. Meanwhile, in a clearly erroneous report, one of the Sunday English-language dailies, asserted on November 17 that the U.S. and UK were thinking of legalizing the LTTE after the conclusion of the Oslo conference. End Note.)

Kumaratunga's Recent Comments

15. (SBU) Somewhat at odds with her own party's statement, the president's public stance on the peace process has been relatively upbeat. In a wide-ranging speech on November 12 commemorating her eighth year in office, President Kumaratunga seemed to regard the GSL's peace initiative in relatively benign fashion, stating:

"I am glad that the new government of the UNP (United National Party) has taken action to carry forward the peace process through a negotiated settlement...Measures adopted in the last one year to reduce tension between the antagonists seem to have progressed satisfactorily. It is gladdening to note that the government has taken serious note of my insistence on the necessity to engage in a dialogue with the LTTE on the core issues..."

Kumaratunga was also relatively conciliatory regarding the peace process during brief remarks on November 17 at a ceremony honoring the visiting Croatian president (see Ref A).

Reactions to the Statement

16. (C) The PA statement received considerable coverage in the weekend press. At a late November 16 meeting with the Ambassador and DCM, Milinda Moragoda, a key minister involved in peace process issues, and Norwegian Ambassador Jon Westborg both expressed considerable concern about the PA statement. Moragoda indicated that Prime Minister Wickremesinghe planned to respond in public to the statement later this week. He added that the PM planned to make a national address thoroughly reviewing the government's peace initiative at some point after the November 25 donors' conference in Oslo. The normally unflappable Westborg, who was clearly a bit stung by the PA statement, was not certain how his government would respond. (Note: For his part, Westborg also faced some biting personal criticism last week. Citing press reporting on Westborg's comments at a private meeting, some in the radical JVP party asserted he had made light of the recent conviction of LTTE leader Prabhakaran for a 1996 terrorist attack. In response to the JVP's ludicrous charge, Westborg said he had been misquoted.)

17. (C) The Ambassador, underscoring strong U.S. support for the GoN role, told Moragoda and Westborg that he thought that the statement was a cheap shot, mean-spirited, and ill-timed. It was possible, the Ambassador noted nevertheless, that the statement could result in a net positive if the GSL shrewdly used it in

its discussions with the LTTE as a means to gain concessions.

18. (C) In other soundings, Desmond Fernando, a human rights lawyer with close links to the government, told polchief that he thought that the PA statement was "very unhelpful." Fernando added that he thought that the PA was edging toward playing the same game that had bedeviled past peace processes, i.e., the party out of power playing the "Sinhalese card" in order to gain popular support at the expense of the national interest in communal harmony. Kedish Loganathan, an analyst at a local think-tank, thought that the PA would be careful not to go too far in their criticism because it would not want to alienate the public, which was strongly pro-peace process. In making this point, Loganathan took note of President Kumaratunga's recent comments and the fact that they were far more moderate in tone than the PA statement itself.

19. (C) ((Note: Mission has not picked up any response by the LTTE to the PA statement. The Tamil National Alliance, which is generally pro-LTTE, rejected much of the substance of the PA statement in a press release dated November 17, specifically underscoring its strong support for Norway's facilitation effort. End Note.)))

COMMENT

110. (C) The PA statement is on the mark in some ways, e.g., the LTTE is indeed doing some very nasty things in the north and east (see Ref C). That said, while it is important to call attention to the LTTE's misdeeds, there can be little doubt that the peace process is Sri Lanka's best way forward. The thrust of the PA's statement seems to call into question that basic premise, however. The PA's attack is especially unfortunate and ill-timed given the upcoming Oslo conference and the slated start of the third round of talks shortly thereafter. In addition, the criticism of the Norwegians is extremely unfair, as is the glancing blow at the U.S. and the UK. While the exact genesis of the statement is difficult to discern, the PA is clearly envious and resentful that the GSL is getting the credit for the peace process, which it feels (correctly) that it started eight years ago when Kumaratunga first took power. We also guess that a "good cop, bad cop" routine is going on here, with Kumaratunga keeping her hands clean while she gives her party license to hit out (there is little doubt that the statement would not have been issued without the president's review and approval).

111. (C) At this point, given the strong support for the peace process among the body politic, we do not see the PA statement as making a big impact, but it could be a portent of attacks to come. The Ambassador will bring up our concerns in upcoming meetings with Kumaratunga and Kadirgamar. END COMMENT.

Suggested Press Guidance

112. (U) The following is suggested "if asked" press guidance in case the Department is questioned re the PA statement:

BEGIN TEXT:

"We have noted with dismay the November 15 statement made by the People's Alliance (PA). The tone of the statement is unduly harsh and corrosive with respect to cohabitation between the major parties regarding the peace process. The U.S. strongly believes that the Sri Lankan government is moving the peace process in the right direction, and we urge all concerned parties to reinforce that effort and not try to undermine it. In addition, some of the statement's charges are wildly inaccurate. In particular, we take issue with the statement's charges against the government of Norway. We strongly believe that the Norwegian facilitation effort is impartial, transparent, and nobly motivated. In fact, we believe that Sri Lanka and the entire international community owe Norway a debt of gratitude.

As regards the U.S., we reject the statement's implicit assertion that we are somehow softening our approach to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. At the upcoming Oslo conference, no U.S. officials will be meeting with the group and the LTTE will remain on the U.S. Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) listing.

We remain deeply concerned by LTTE activities, and continue to urge the LTTE to renounce terrorism and

violence publicly. The group should also make clear once and for all that it has no intention whatsoever to press for separatism. We also call on the LTTE to respect human rights and democratic norms, and urge it to accept Sri Lankan government sovereignty fully, including the island-wide application of the nation's constitution and its law enforcement system."

END TEXT.

113. (U) Minimize considered.

WILLS